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SPANISH CHURCHES IN MEXICO.

THE present architecture of Mexico dates from the advent of the Spaniard. The art of the aboriginal Aztecs had no more influence upon that which the followers of Cortés brought with them than had the Iroquois wigwam upon the design of the Capitol at Washington. There was not vitality in it to survive, not vitality enough even to tinge the Spanish traditions; and it is not without symbolic significance that when Cortés laid the foundations of the Cathedral of Mexico he based them on the broken fragments of carved Aztec gods.

Exactly what and how important this primitive Mexican architecture was is likely to remain a mooted question, for Cortés, outraged by the human sacrifices of the Mexican religion, hastened to destroy, as

one of his first acts, all the paraphernalia of heathen worship, and in so doing destroyed most of the records of the race, together with the carved images of the

gods. The numerous chroniclers, however, did something to repair these losses by their copious accounts both of the events of the conquest and of the Aztec civilization. One of them, Bernal Diaz, thus describes the appearance of the City of Mexico, when Cortés' army first entered it:—

"I well remember the spectacle," he

writes. "It seems now, after so many years, as present to my mind as if it were but yesterday. Throngs of people swarmed through the streets and on the canals, filling every doorway and window, and clustering on the roofs of the buildings. The dwellings of the poorer classes were indeed chiefly of



CHURCH AT VALENCIA

MEXICO

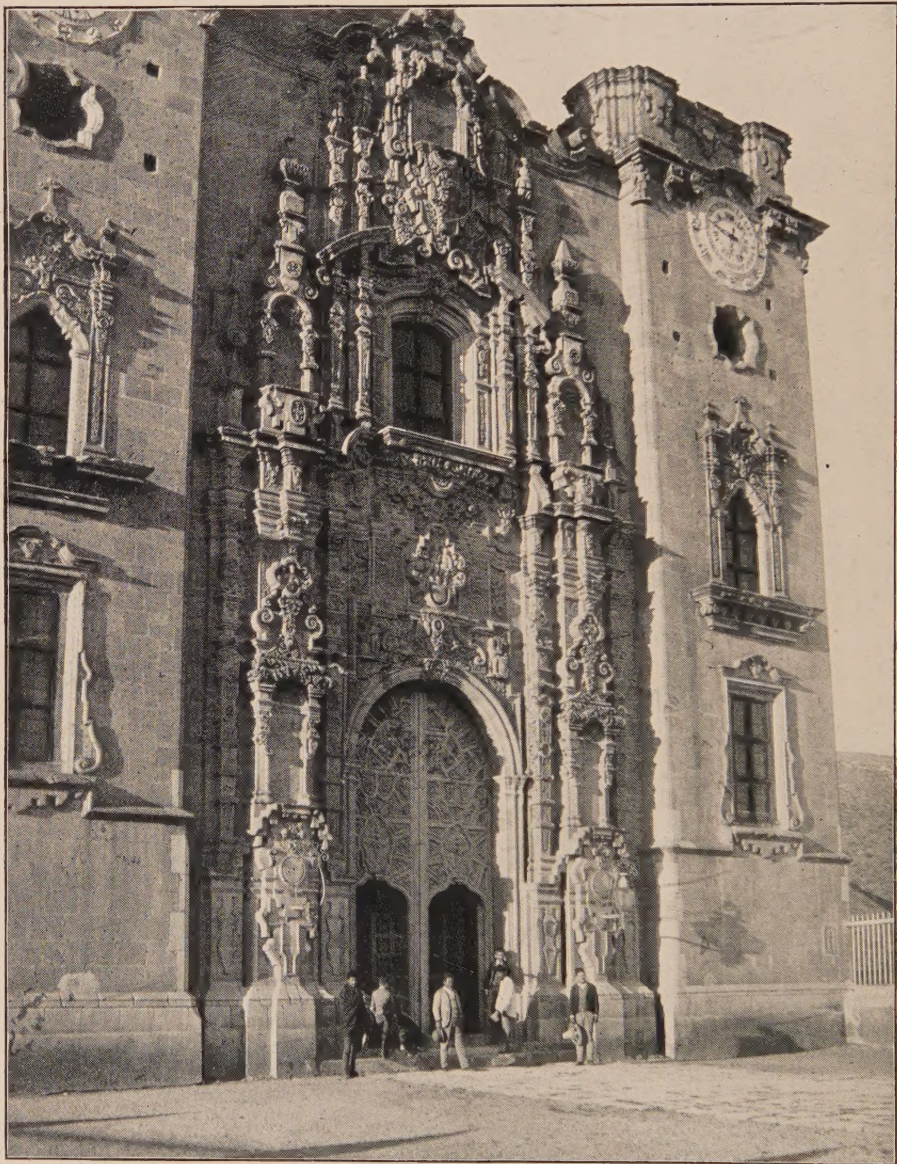


PLATE L

PORTAL, CHURCH OF VALENCIANA, MEXICO

reeds and mud. But the great avenue was lined with the houses of the nobles, who were encouraged by the Emperor to make the capital their residence. These houses were of a red, porous stone drawn from the quarries in the neighborhood, and, though they rarely rose to a second story, often covered a large space of ground. The flat roofs were protected by stone parapets, so that every house was a fortress. Occasionally a great square or market-place intervened, surrounded by its porticos of stone and stucco; or a pyramidal temple reared its colossal bulk, crowned with its tapering sanctuaries, and altars blazing with inextinguishable fires."

The pious Bernal did well to preface such an account as this with the statement that "the spectacle seemed as present to his mind as if it were but yesterday," for, as a matter of fact, it has been conclusively proved that he was never in the country at all, and that his narration, which pretends to be the story of an actor and eye-witness, is merely a collection of second-hand tales. Indeed, the greater part of the stories of the Spanish chroniclers were, it is to be feared, colored and embellished for home consumption, and it is upon such testimony, alas! that Prescott's picturesque history, from which most of us have gained our impressions of ancient Mexico, was founded. In the light of pitiless modern investigation the empires and palaces, the luxury and splendor, the halls of the Montezumas that shone with the glories of an Oriental tale are dwindling and fading. The Aztec emperor is fast becoming a mere chieftain, the glittering retinue a handful of pitiful Indians quarreling with one another for the supremacy, the magnificent city of palaces but a pueblo of adobe.

But we are here in no way concerned with this ancient civilization, whatever it may have been. Suffice it that, with the advent of the Spaniards, it was overpowered and swept out of sight as if it had never existed. Thenceforth the civilization, the laws and the arts of New Spain were the civilization, the laws and the arts of Old Spain.

On Nov. 18, 1518, Hernando Cortés (on a semi-private adventure, very much, after its fashion, like Dr. Jameson's Raid, in which success meant public sanction and failure spelled private ruin) set sail from Santiago de Cuba for the coast of Mexico.

On the thirteenth of August, three years later, he entered the capital city as a conqueror, and for precisely three centuries Mexico remained a dependency of the Spanish crown.

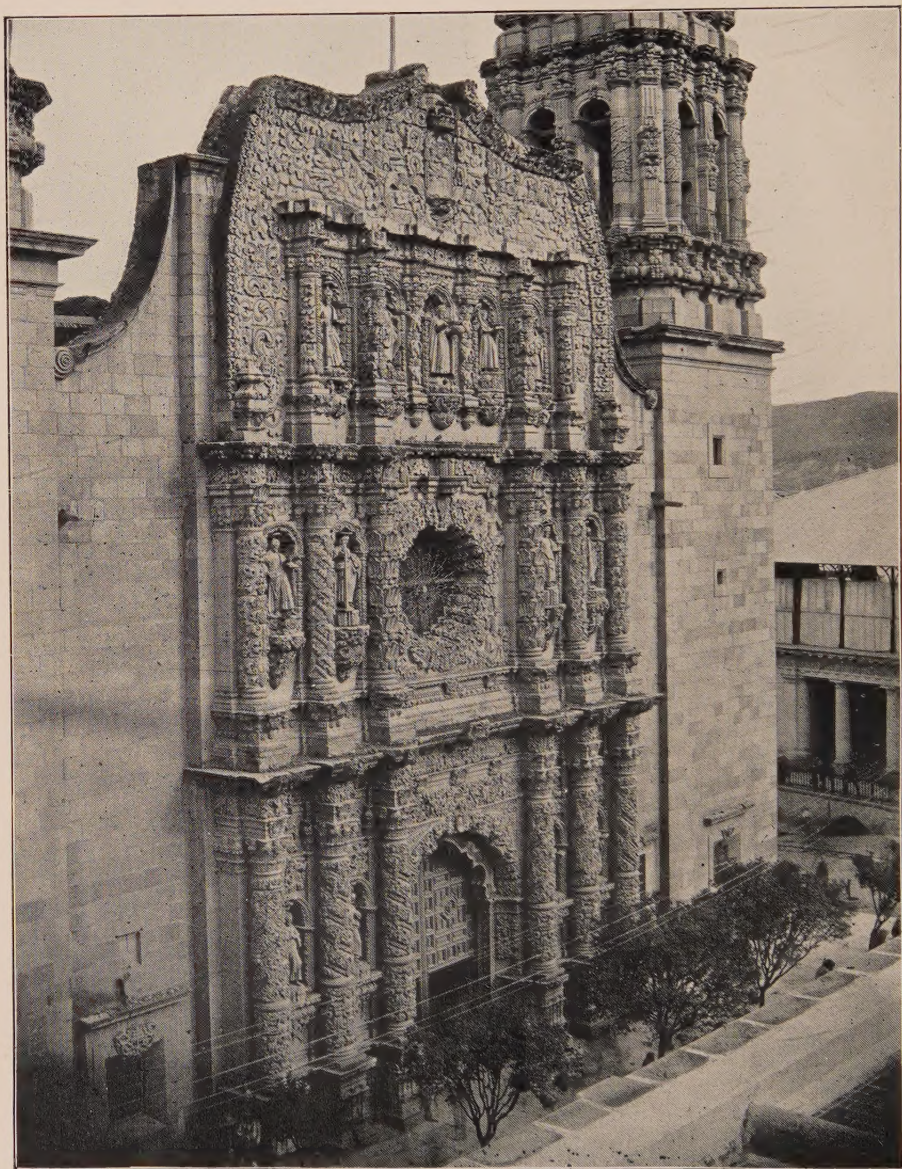
At this time Spain bade fair to become the mistress of the world. In literature she was represented by Cervantes, Lope de Vega and Calderon. Of discoverers and conquerors she had sent forth Columbus, Cortés and Pizarro. Her warriors were adventurous and brave; her soldiers inherited the gallantry of the followers of Charles V. In art she held the foremost place; Murillo, Velasquez and Ribiera were her honored sons. She was the court of Europe.

To this height of civilization Mexico leaped immediately after the conquest. From the mother-country she drew a culture which at once gave her the right to rank with the most polished nations of Europe. For this favored colony was no cold and sterile land such as received the pilgrims of North America, where all thought of the refinements of life was perforce banished until the mere leave to live had been wrung from a grudging nature. Mexico was a clement and smiling land, producing wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, where a docile race of enslaved Indians made great works possible, and to which flocked hundreds of adventurers representing Spain's best in genius and in birth.

In less than four years from the destruction of the Aztec City of Mexico by the conquering Cortés, a new Spanish city had risen on its ruins, and other cities sprung into life all over the land. Imposing buildings were erected, and national roads, viaducts, bridges and aqueducts were planned so wisely and on so large a scale as still to challenge admiration.

The main factor in this rapid spread of Spanish arts and Spanish civilization in the new land was the organized and disciplined influence of the Roman Catholic Church.

When Cortés had completed the conquest of the Mexican capital in 1521, with the news of his victory he sent an urgent letter begging the Emperor that priests be sent from Spain to begin at once the conversion of the heathen land that he had won. There was a delay of nearly three years in the sending of the desired missionaries, clothed



with assured authority; but eventually twelve of them were sent, amply authorized for their work by the bull of Pope Adrian VI. These missionaries, usually styled the "Twelve Apostles of Mexico," arrived in 1524 and other agents of all the prominent religious orders soon followed them.

Urged on and given every assistance by Cortés, who, with all his personal ambition and greed of gold, was yet deeply religious, and whose highest aim was, perhaps, in all sincerity, to plant the cross upon this virgin soil, these missionaries lost no time in pressing the good work of conversion. Converts were made with amazing ease and rapidity, for the Aztec worship, remarkable for its ceremonial, had well prepared its votaries for the splendors of the Romish ritual, especially when the former religion contained so many startling and myste-

rious coincidences with Christianity. It was not difficult to win over to the new faith an Indian who already believed in a future life, who had mythical stories of a Deluge and a Tower of Babel, who believed in the coming of a White Messiah, who carved his temples with the cross as an emblem of worship, who had a religious rite not unlike the Christian communion, and another still more like the Christian baptism. Indeed, so rapidly did conversion spread, that twenty years after the first advent of the missionaries one of them

made the vaunt that nine millions of converts had been admitted within the fold. Though our faith in this statement may be somewhat shaken by the fact that this number probably exceeded the entire population of the country, it is unquestionable that the number of converts was enormous.

The building of churches naturally progressed in proportion, and at the end of the second century after the conquest it is estimated that

there were no less than eight thousand separate church buildings in Mexico, sixty of them in the capital city alone.

After what has been said it will not be necessary to explain that Mexico drew the architecture for these churches ready made from Spain—Mexican church architecture merely followed the progress of Renaissance architecture in Spain, step by step, under another sky. There is the same use and misuse of the Orders, the

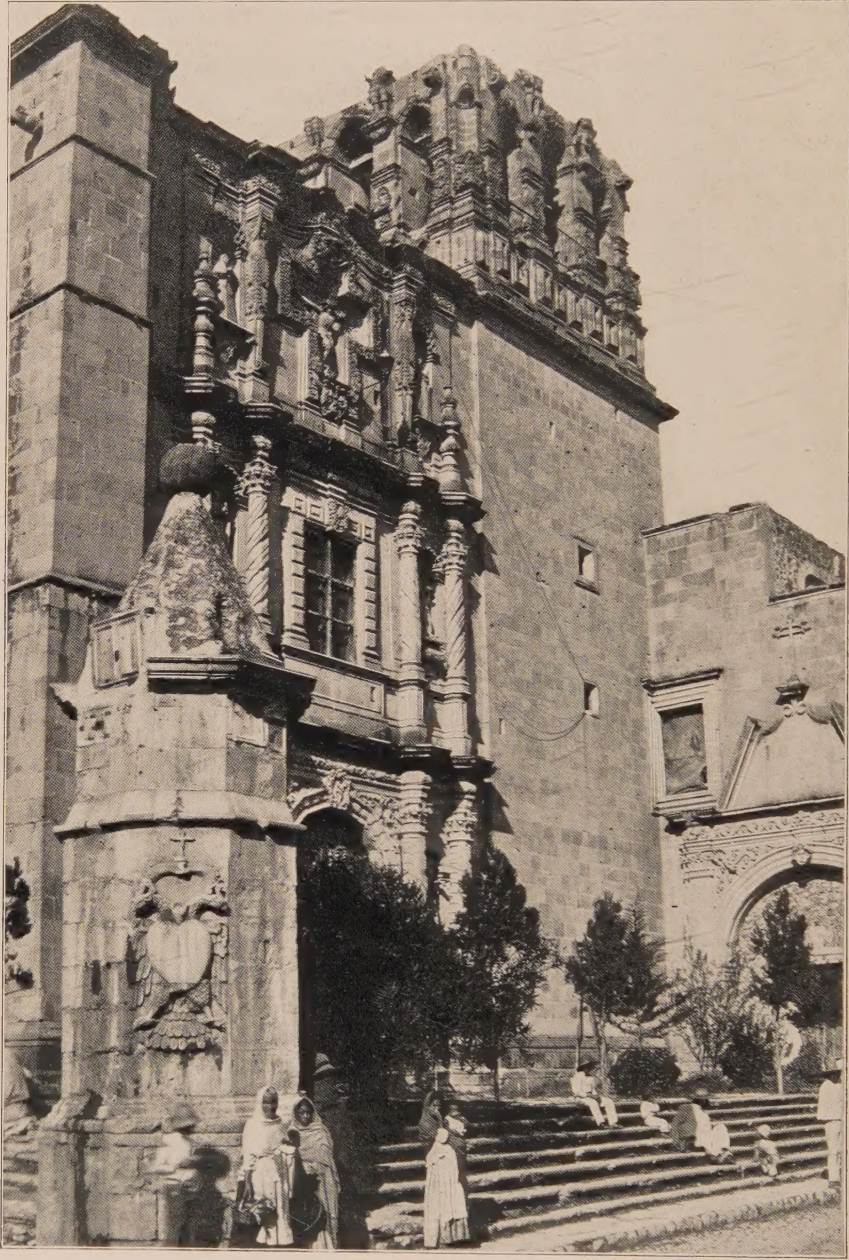


PORTAL, CHURCH OF SAN JUAN DE DIOS

MEXICO

same excellence in scale, massing and general proportion, the same over-thickening of walls, the same bewildering richness of ornament, betraying the influence of Arabic and Moorish decoration, the same ever-pleasing ensemble, even when the architectural purist must grumble most at shortcomings in detail.

The miraculous story of the Virgin of Guadalupe, to whose shrine, "The Church of the Well" (Plate XLIX.), thousands of infirm Mexicans flock every year as they do to Lourdes in France, is the chief Christian



legend of the country. Briefly retold from the narrative of Fray Agustin de Vetancurt it is as follows:—

As a certain Indian, Juan Diego, was on his way to hear mass on a Sunday morning in 1531, he heard, as he passed a hill called Tepeyacac, celestial music, and looking up beheld amid splendors a Lady (the Virgin) who bade him go to the Bishop, and tell that it was her will that a temple should be built to her in that place. Juan delivered the message, but the Bishop doubted, and would not give credence to the tale. Juan again sought the hillside, disconsolate, and again the Lady appeared to him, who when she had heard of the Bishop's incredulity repeated her command in yet stronger terms. But the Bishop, whoever he was, had apparently small faith in signs and wonders reported to him by wandering Indians, and, still incredulous, ordered Juan to bring him some sure sign that what he told was true. Again Juan sought the Lady, and was commanded to return again the next day when he should have the token which the Bishop demanded. But when Juan arrived at his home he found there his uncle lying very sick of a fever; and early in the morning he was forced to go with all speed in search of a confessor to administer the last rites to the dying man. That he might not be delayed by the Lady's importunities (!) he went, not by the usual path, but by another, skirting the eastern side of the hill. But as he passed the hill he saw the Lady coming down to him and heard her calling to him. He told her of his errand and of its urgent need for haste, whereupon she replied that he need not feel further troubled, as his uncle's illness was already cured. Then, in that barren spot, she ordered him to cut some flowers, and to his amazement he perceived roses growing there. She charged him to take these miraculous flowers to the Bishop as the sign that he had requested. The Indian wrapped them in his blanket and hastened away, and then from the spot where the Holy Virgin had stood gushed forth a spring of brackish water where the Church now stands. And lo! when the Indian unwrapped his blanket before the Bishop there was seen the Virgin's image beautifully painted upon it. This blanket is still carefully preserved and it is a point much insisted upon by believers in the miracle, that although the glass over the relic

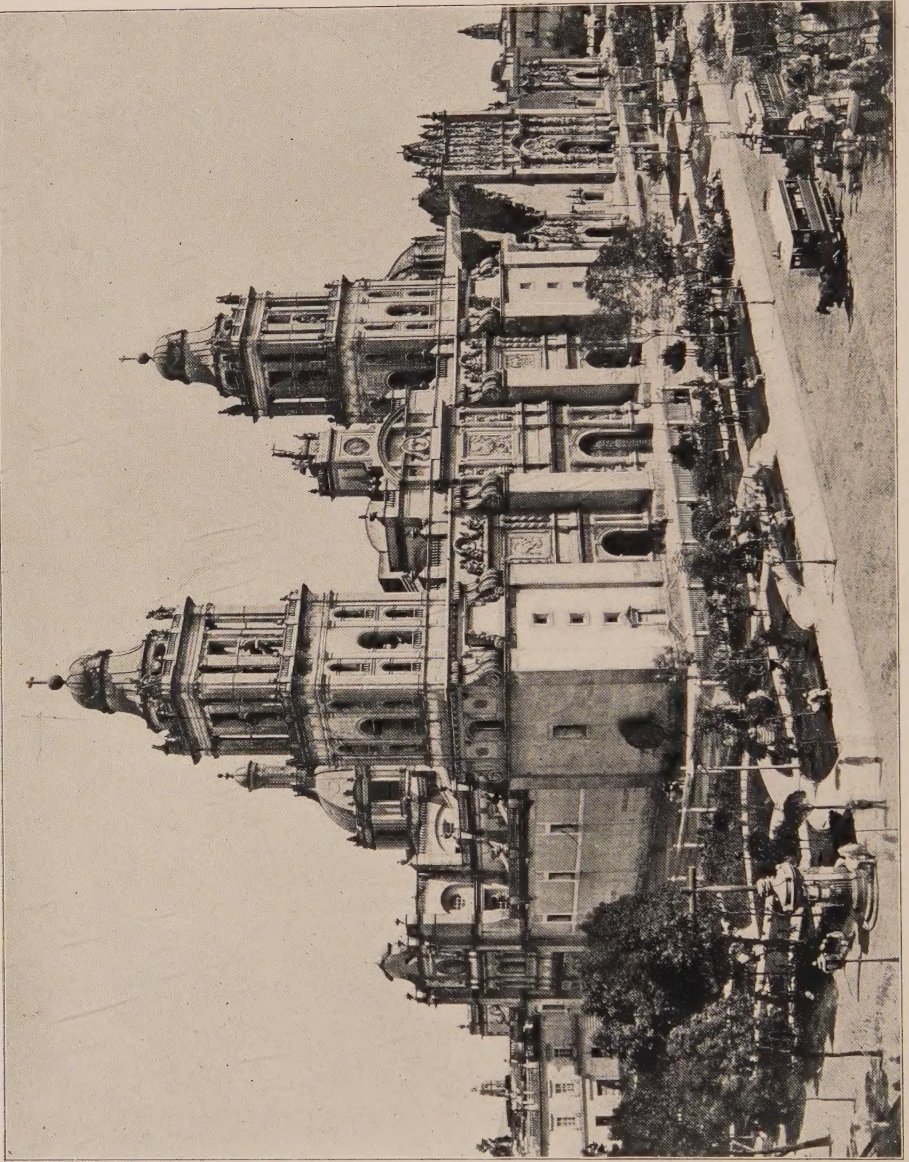
has been three times removed and the image examined by as many separate committees of painters and chemists, no one has yet discovered in what medium the painting is done.

The Cathedral of Zacatecas (Plate LI.) was begun in 1612, and completed a century and a quarter later. It is built of brown stone, well cut and profusely carved. The west front, above which rises a tower, is especially rich, being decorated with life-sized statues of Christ and the Apostles set in niches between the columns.

The corner stone of the Church of San Agustin (Plate LII.) in the city of Mexico was laid by the Dominican Fathers in 1421. This first church was destroyed by fire in 1676 and the present building, which was erected on the former site, was dedicated in 1692. The church was dismantled in 1861, when the Dominican order in Spain was suppressed, and the Biblioteca Nacional was established in the building. In common with almost all Spanish-American churches its mass is admirable, and in this case the columns, basso-relievos, friezes and other embellishments are executed in excellent taste.

The Cathedral of Mexico (Plate LIII.) was built upon the site of a great Aztec temple. The first cathedral was destroyed by Philip II. who desired to replace it with a more stately structure, and the first stone of the existing building was laid in 1573. It was finally dedicated in 1677, and the towers were completed in 1791. The façade, at the sides of which rise the towers, is divided by massive buttresses into three portals, which in turn are separated by cornices into two divisions,—the first Doric, and very good in proportion; the second, Ionic, confused and unsatisfactory. The basso-relievos, statues, friezes, bases and capitals are of white marble, making a harmonious color effect with the gray stone. The towers are in two divisions, the lower Doric, the upper Ionic, this last finished with admirable details, and the crown of each is a bell-shaped dome, capped by spheres and crosses of stone. Above the whole, as seen from the southern side of the Plaza, rises the dome, surmounted by its slender, graceful lantern.

The Sagrario Metropolitano or "Sacred Church" (Plate LIV.) immediately joins the Cathedral on the east, and was the first parish church of the city. It was founded



about the year 1521, being then dedicated to Santiago, the patron saint of Spain. The building is in the highly ornate "churrigueresque" style (notably practised by and called after the Spanish architect Churriguera about the end of the seventeenth century) and its rich façade and harmonious mass contrast agreeably with the grander mass and severer style of the Cathedral. The general design is a Greek cross of symmetrical proportions, the relatively high, vaulted roof being upheld by finely-carved stone pillars, in keeping with which are equally well carved pilasters.

For many years in the history of Mexico a succession of Aztec rulers held their capital at the then important town of Tacuba, since sunk to be a suburb of the city of Mexico. The last of these monarchs, who was named Jetelepanquetzaltzin, was hanged — though not perhaps for that reason — by Cortés in 1525. The Church (Plate LV.) is of the same type as the California Mission buildings.

Morelia, anciently Valladolid, is built upon a hill that rises in the midst of a lovely valley. The Cathedral (Plate LVI.) is situated upon the summit of the height, and from this peak the streets descend in all directions toward the encircling meadows. The Cathedral was begun in 1640, and was dedicated, without its two beautiful and particularly impressive towers, in 1706. The towers were completed in 1744.

Venetian Well-Curbs.

VENICE, mistress of herself for some ten centuries, exhibits with singular completeness, and nowhere more comprehensively or more concisely than in her unbroken series of well-curbs, varying developments of a style which bears throughout the imprint of her peculiar character. True it is that Venice can boast nothing equal in beauty or importance to Nicolo Pisano's great fountain at Perugia, nothing so rich in individual interest as that of Jacopo della Guercia at Siena, nothing so grandiose as that of the Trevi in Rome; yet there resides in her wealth of examples an interest and instructiveness which no isolated work can possibly possess. Hers is the art not so much of the citizen and city-square as of the individual and the private house — not that of the supreme artist, but the vernacular art of the people, the expression of the current taste, the reflection of their historical conditions, and the embodiment of the influences to which they were subject.

The *pozzo* is an almost invariable feature of each little public square, to which it does not necessarily stand in architectural relation, though that is common enough, but by far the greater number of examples are in the courtyards of private houses. There are more than two hundred and sixty examples, either extant or of which there are drawings, and this number represents types extending over eleven centuries, from the eighth to the eighteenth.

Among all these well-curbs there is one leading type, perhaps outnumbering all the others put together, which is illustrated, first by the simple conversion of antique capitals, next by the comparatively close imitation of their forms, and, finally, by the endlessly varied modifications of the same leading idea, which were not wholly laid aside till the beginning of the sixteenth century.

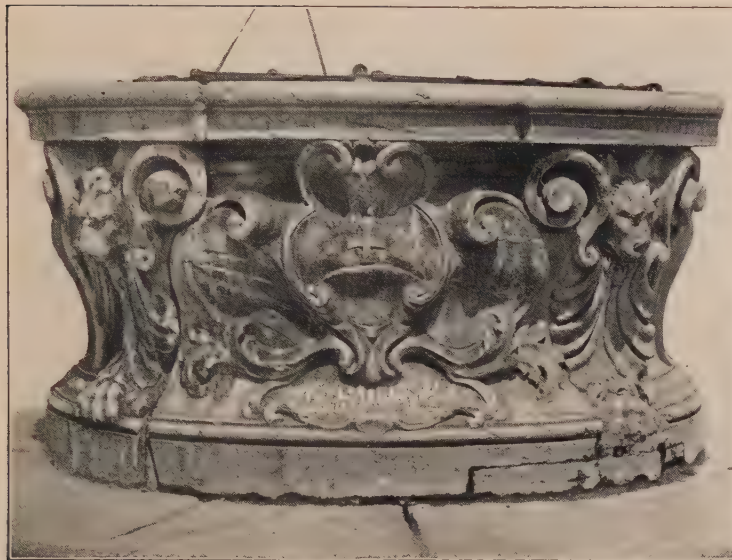
Till the end of the twelfth century Byzantine influence was supreme,



WELL-CURB, PALAZZO VENDRAMIN

VENICE





WELL-CURB, CAMPO LA MADDALENA

VENICE

class by themselves, abruptly severed from what had gone before, uninfluenced by it, and only faintly reflected in subsequent work. This class is not distinguished by much beauty or interest, and indeed the inability of the Italian craftsman to express himself freely or naturally in the language of Gothic is nowhere more apparent than in this class of design, which his Northern brother would have made the medium of

and the forms in vogue were either simple squares, circles, or circles within squares. There was usually a well-marked band round the top and bottom, while in many cases the surface was broken by shallow round-headed panels, which were gradually deepened, till, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries they developed into the familiar form of a square, with one or two panels on each side, containing a circular drum, the flat divisions between the panels being replaced by twisted, knotted or coupled shafts. There is more than one instance of a classical capital being turned and used wrong way up, with the volutes resting on the ground, and it is quite conceivable that some of the Renaissance designs were suggested by this rather high-handed method of proceeding.

The thirteenth and early fourteenth century examples, which immediately succeeded those produced under Eastern influences, form quite a distinct

beautiful and imaginative work.

There is little variety in the form, the top being nearly always square and the lower part as invariably octagonal. Sometimes the side is merely canted off and gathered over at the top; more generally the change from square to octagon is effected by the use of an ogee-headed arch, the four cardinal sides being correspondingly panelled. In other instances the well-head is octagonal throughout, and the familiar arch and shaft do duty on each side. There are other variants, but they



WELL-CURB, PALAZZO LOREDAN

VENICE



are generally simple—if not bald—and the detail throughout is thin and commonplace.

As the fourteenth century advanced Gothic was cast aside, and a thorough-going reversion to the outline of the antique capital took its place. Accepted in the first instance with but slight modifications, it was brought, by the end of the fifteenth century, to little more than the semblance of its former self, and, from that time forward was never seen in anything approaching its integrity. During a century and a half, however, so large was the increase in the number of well-curbs, that the antique form is still, to take the city through, the predominant one.

The first and most natural modification was the introduction of some enrichment—the lion of St. Mark, the Agnus Dei, the Cross, the Sacred Monogram, or, in the case of private works, the family coat-of-arms and supporters—standing out in relief from the surface of the bell. These were

succeeded by more abstract forms, in which religious feeling was more important, small at first and larger as time went on. Next, the cap was divided horizontally with a broad band of ornament above or below, and cornice and plinth began to show themselves. All this meant some confusion of thought, and not less of effect, but the original source of inspiration was, as yet, by no means wholly concealed.

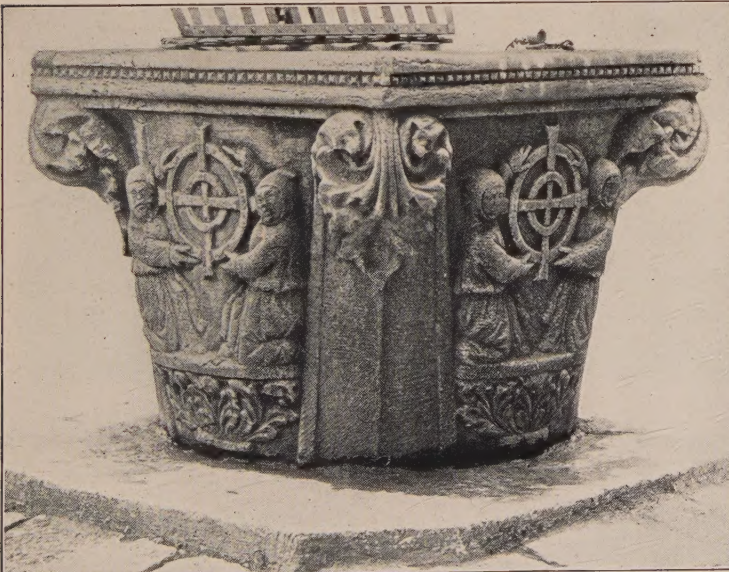
After the end of the fifteenth century, generalization as to styles becomes impossible. Governed no longer by traditions

or even by fashions, each carver shaped and ornamented his well-curb after his own personal fancy and caprice; subsequent work became in a word, individual and not generic. Broadest types alternated with the simplest, the most baroque with the most severely rectilinear. To attempt any formal discrimination after the beginning of the sixteenth century would not only be confusing,—it would be hopeless.



WELL-CURB, PALAZZO PAPADOPOLI

VENICE



WELL-CURB, ACCADEMIA DI BELLE ARTI

VENICE



